

STUDENT NEWSLETTER the x

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Emily Carr College of Art

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"...Think of this, too: while you are hanging back, they never hesitate; while you stay at home, they are always abroad; for they think that the farther they go the more they will get, while you think that any movement may endanger what you have already. If they win a victory, they follow it up at once, and if they suffer a defeat, they scarcely fall back at all. As for their bodies, they regard them as expendable for their city's sake, as though they were not their own; but each man cultivates his own intelligence, again with a view to doing something notable for his city. If they aim at something and do not get it, they think that they have been deprived of what belonged to them already; whereas, if their enterprise is successful, they regard that success as nothing compared to what they will do next. Suppose they fail in some undertaking; they make good the loss immediately by setting their hopes in some other direction. Of them alone it may be said that they possess a thing almost as soon as they have begun to desire it, so quickly with them does action follow upon decision. And so they go on working in hardship and danger all the days of their lives, seldom enjoying their possessions because they are always adding to them. Their view of a holiday is to do what needs doing; they prefer hardship and activity to peace and quiet. In a word, they are by nature incapable of either living a quiet life themselves or of allowing anyone else to do so."

— from the Corinthian speech in the debate at Sparta, Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, Book 1, Chapter 6 (c. 415 B.C.)

By persistence on the part of certain individuals, no matter their weariness and interest, the following interview with Neil Bercery has been completed at last. By no means could any introduction describe the person nor the work he accomplishes; in fact, the intentions of the interview were to provide whatever possible clarity about just these aspects. The question arises, why an interview with this person out of the contemporary surroundings? It was a belief on the part of the interviewers that perhaps what we potentially had was a medium through which several pertinent questions could be examined. The most notable shortcoming of what follows is that there was not a full enough opportunity to mention and connect other information and ideas. A main theme underlying much that is alluded to concerns the paradoxes of progress, a subject we hope will receive further attention.

All this might at first sound pretentious. For one thing, why bother to delve into such questions and with such an individual? To this there are at least two answers. First, the interviewers would be deeply delighted if many others would undertake any sort of comparable study of contemporary art and artists. Such an inquiry if serious would surely be a step forward in interrelation, not backward. Secondly, 20th century living imposes this responsibility upon us: it is simply a fact that modern conditions, whether we like it or not, oblige us to achieve some apprehension of each other's assumptions. Isolationism is gone. We cannot claim that the present interview satisfies these demands, and we hope that where we have fallen short others will do better. Yet we have few qualms about the validity of what has been attempted. We hope that any such discussion will continue to occur in 'X' newsletter.

— Gordon Moore, Harry McIntyre

GORDON MOORE: Could you tell us what you are doing now, either at the Vancouver Art Gallery or in your own work?

NEIL BERCERY: I think there are a lot of similarities in what I'm doing with the art gallery and my own work. But I'll leave the discussion of my own work until later and just for now talk about what I am doing at the gallery (VAG). Do you want any details about the extension program? Okay, very briefly the extension program at the VAG takes "art," most of it from the permanent collection of the gallery, some of it borrowed from artists, to put together an exhibition — sometimes around a theme, sometimes around an issue in contemporary art. The exhibition is taken into the province to different towns and presented to schools and community groups. It's not just dumped and left to the mercy of local insight or prejudice. We, who work in extension, have an important function in "animating," bringing it to life, elucidating as honestly and extensively as possible the artist's concerns — making it accessible. And this is one of the things that I am particularly interested in, that accessibility. I would think that a gallery has a responsibility to the community to demystify the art process, and their relation to artists, to make what they have accessible.

HARRY MCINTYRE: That which mystifies also demystifies the art process? That is a most peculiar notion. What is it that the VAG has, what is it showing to people out of town?

BERCERY: It is to a large extent a museum, an art museum, where work refers to the past. There are many definitions of a museum. Museums can be either totally concerned with the preservation and explanation of cultural artifacts and debris or with the collection of cultural commodities from the immediate past, i.e. the "new" directions of contemporary art, or a combination of both or a mix which includes being an informational resource like a library, a catalyst and focus for contemporary art in the locality, a co-ordination point for significant international touring exhibitions, a forum for exploration of new forms and approaches, a verifier of authenticity and excellence, a place for people to build careers, a cog in the machinery which maintains dominant ideologies, a place which maintains a necessary link with arts past, a place where "art" can be made and where

artists can work, etc. etc., or any combination of the above in varying degrees of proficiency. They deal with artifacts and related ideas.

MCINTYRE: It tends to be a provincial attitude centrally, really, all of a sudden in the outlying areas, the Vancouver Art Gallery gives a propagandized version of what art supposedly constitutes — the credibility thrives on landscape scenes with nice snowflakes falling down. So the gallery does a lot of saving the appearances while making "great" cultural notices?

BERCERY: I will say a bit about that. That is one of the criticisms of the program and it is a criticism that comes from people in Vancouver as well as from outlying centres. They are sometimes suspicious of anything that comes from the city, particularly Vancouver. They don't want to have people coming to their community saying this is what contemporary art is. It is seen that the statement is made simply by coming into a town and saying "We are from Vancouver Art Gallery." You are implying that what you have brought is significant and that it is art. We can't avoid this presumption, probably accurate, and it is something we must work around if we are to honestly represent (if possible) the artist's concerns. An art gallery or art museum to many people denotes prestige, acceptability, a stamp of approval, a definition of excellence, credibility — and that is why we as amateurs travel with the work. We could simply send the work alone and that would be limited, but we go with it as the idea is to bridge the gap, to deal with the psychological objection to the work and try to bring out the artist's main concerns.

MCINTYRE: In some ways I can see where this would only further obscure and mystify. Surely as well, Neil, if it is coming from the VAG bank it is probably not that contemporary, I mean in attitudes towards art.

BERCERY: Okay. Our job is to extend the gallery function. And the Gallery is in part a museum, so to some extent we're extending a museum function. And we're taking work which has gone through all the changes that an object goes through once it's put into a museum, into an institutional context, a context which clearly, I think, reflects a certain position in the social hierarchy. It identifies with a certain socio-political stance. Okay, you can deal with that. You can take the work out and talk about those issues to the people viewing. You can say, look, we've brought out work that isn't contemporary and is affected by its museum associations. I think you can take out any work at all and deal with the contemporary issues, even if it's a historical work.

At the same time as dealing with techniques and the art historical conditions of an artifact's having been made, one can also examine and discuss the differences and similarities between the exhibited work and contemporary artists, processes and concerns. And by an inductive method relate both to a viewer's own experiences — which of course overcomes some initial hostility if it exists. You see, this work we do is essentially a subversive activity: the amateur is an agent of change. In some ways a touring exhibition is like a travelling medicine show. A trick, something for everyone, and being able to let people enjoy being tricked out of their old preoccupations with craft, skill and product while extending to them the ideas surrounding artistic excellence, and the enjoyment and excitement of new, previously unavailable, contemplative and philosophical experiences. We do incidentally also take out quite contemporary "things."

The other thing that happens to an institutional artifact has to do with the passage of time — the fact that the art never remains constant. It's always in a state of decay once it leaves the artist. I feel quite differently about the work I did last week than that which I'm working on now. In a museum we're dealing with something the artist has put behind or put aside, put out of their lives, that's how I feel about my things once I've stopped working on them.

MOORE: So we're still left with the political and complex thing which occurs through the art gallery standing behind artists in a historical sense, puffing up their importance and obscuring a better understanding. At this time anyway we are left knowing often that participating in what the gallery presents, how these works are presented, may mean participating in mistaken collective representatives.

BERCERY: That's very difficult, and yes it's true. How an art gallery goes about purchasing, putting an artist's work in the permanent collection, or giving an exhibition to a particular person is a difficult issue that causes much resentment and misunderstanding but is a reality we have to face and deal with because, if we are lucky, we're going to continue to have art galleries and museums. I think a lot of young artists are caught in between wanting to totally ignore the galleries, the institutions, the arbiters of taste, and at the same time wanting or needing the sort of recognition that only these institutions can give them in terms of furthering their careers, getting grants, or being able to support themselves. So a lot of them get caught up halfway in between. Some of them will opt for producing acceptable works, doing it

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very well perhaps; some of them will opt to go to a parallel or alternative systems, which in many ways is just a mirror of the gallery institution. Those parallel galleries can become quite bureaucratized and institutionalized themselves. This is an example of institutionalizing the problem in the alternative. As soon as you incorporate the problem into your solution, then you haven't really made much progress.

MOORE: What is there in the extension program that you relish or find a correspondence with in your own work?

BERCERY: I like to travel, there are themes in my work (both sorts) of movement, chance, change, specific place and exchange and connection. I also have eclectic tastes which corresponds to a pluralistic approach to the production of things. In the extension department we have to adapt to an extraordinary range of styles and ideas and present the works as fully as possible. For example, we exhibit a large number of paintings. I support anyone who wants to make paintings although I can't imagine why they do, and I think sometimes they're wasting their time, but I'm very glad they have the opportunity at least to work that through, maybe reject it or develop it. I have had to learn a great deal about painting in the last few months. Okay, so we take the work out, whatever it is,

"The development of human consciousness was thus presented as a history of (ideas) beginning from zero and applied always to the same phenomena, at first in the erroneous beliefs about them and, as time went on, in the form of more and more correct and scientific beliefs. No doubt the history of consciousness does include the story of any number of erroneous beliefs, but the erroneous beliefs of human beings about phenomena are neither the most interesting nor the most important thing about the human beings or about the phenomena."

— Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances, a study in idolatry, Chapter X (1965)

and help people relate to it, make it accessible and particularly draw out of it everything that is in there. It's like anything that's new: some people tend to reject it to begin with. Some of the nicest things I know are acquired tastes, things that I've learnt to like over a period of time. Some of the newer forms of art are like that to other people. You get a chance to talk to a lot of people, and it's surprising just how many active artists there are out there in B.C., working away and desperately in need of contact with somebody from a wider arts community and experience than theirs. They look forward to you coming from one year to the next, and they'll remember the conversation you had the last time you talked to them. Now they'll say, when you were here last time you said these things about my painting; I worked on that, now what do you think.

MCINTYRE: These are people who conceive they're involved in the arts?

BERCERY: Well, I think there's a lot to be gained from input from other people. I wouldn't be doing this job unless I thought contact/communication between people wasn't important. I wouldn't be trying to make manifest the various ideas that I have if I didn't believe in some sort of communication, or that others were going to get something from the experience of it — regardless of whether or not there is always a communication shortfall.

The other thing which is exciting is that you sometimes find a responsiveness in people when it is least expected. A by-product of the job is a building of the possibility that more people in that community will consider art as a legitimate activity and not just something that only the people who can't play floor hockey will do. Actually one of the ECCA first year students down at the art gallery today said they were influenced in part by our program in their coming to the art school. There's another thing I like, exposing the options.

Sometimes there will be classes of kids in a school, they're the what-do-you-call-them, the problem kids. Nobody wants them. They're English-is-a-second-language-kids, the special education kids, the misfit bin classes. Teachers will warn you about them: you'll have all sorts of trouble with... and these kids will come in and love it

PROBLEMS WITH FIRST YEAR

TEACHERS are too good damn prejudice!!!

FOR instance, when the students put their work on the walls, for the teachers to comment... the teachers should FIRST, comment on the art work, THEN!!!! ask "Who dunnit???"

An artist gets a great feeling of disinterest from the apathetic foundation students. A lot of students, well more like ROBOTS, talk but no action. It's TOO TOO TOO BAD most of the students are so fucked up!!! ... These people aren't ARTISTS!!!!

ATTENTION!!!!!!!!!!!!

There is nothing wrong with the work done in the washrooms on the 5th floor. ... It's just paint for CHRISTSAKE.

FROM A VERY FORTUNATE ARTIST

because they don't have to use the tools that they're supposed to have learned and haven't throughout their education. To have access to literature, for example, they will need all the reading and word skills that they haven't learned, and so they avoid books. With visual art they

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don't need anything but their initial response, which they all have, and a chance to learn to trust it.

McINTYRE: I think it's one of the things Picasso said, that in the school system some of the biggest problem children could potentially become some of the better artists.

BERECRY: The same applies also to the exceptional children. A lot that I like about this job has to do with potential, giving people as many options as possible and allowing whatever potential is there the fullest opportunity for growth. I think the program is quite a successful one, it does more than just take the work out, it fulfills a number of the gallery's functions as an information exchange. We put people with questions in touch with the appropriate places. For example, they might want to know what they should do to have an exhibition, or who they could write to for certain information about artists. MOORE: Do you know the size of the budget used in the program?

BERECRY: Not counting salaries, it's \$30,000.

MOORE: And that's for all of B.C.?

BERECRY: Yes, we travel to 60 centers. About 45 of them are animated stops where we make presentations. We also package shows and send them off. Mainly they go to the national exhibition centers, museums, and galleries that are set up around the province. But it's the contact/animation that's so unique with this program.

McINTYRE: Doesn't this whole network of places that are fed information, fed work, exposed to the Vancouver Art Gallery, constitute a political structure?

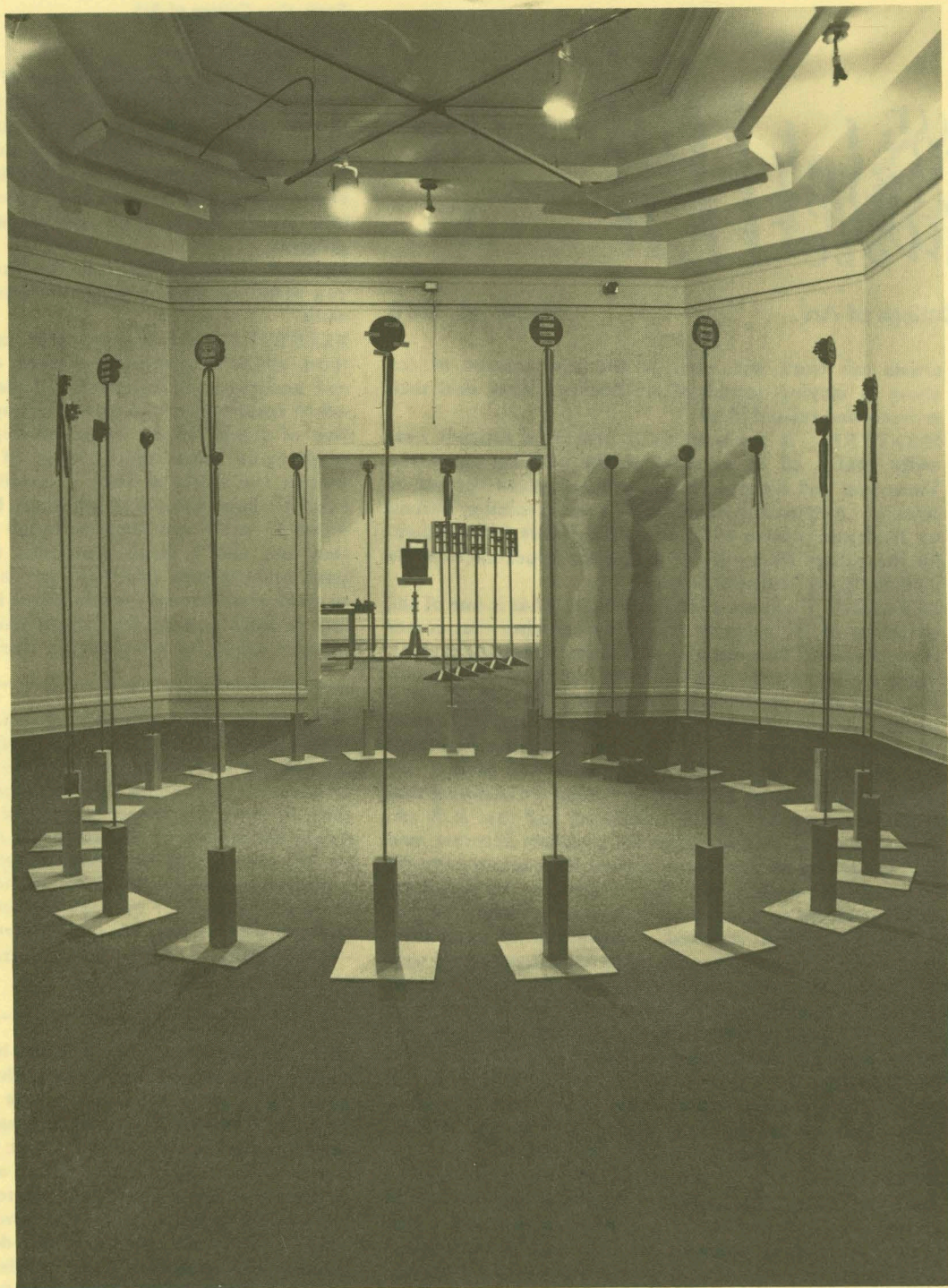
BERECRY: Oh yes, it is.

McINTYRE: I just find it very hard to avoid that.

BERECRY: Yes, you're right, it is, which is very much a thing to be aware of in the program; you're dealing with political realities, it exists in a very real way, in a very political way in the society. And there are limitations consequently, but I'd rather be in there trying to overcome those limitations than ignoring them and wishing they didn't exist. There's a responsibility for the people in the arts community to work on these problems. There is a lot of money being poured into the arts, and if the arts community doesn't agree with the way it's being spent, then they've only got themselves to blame. They should exercise their option to influence things.

MOORE: Do you meet people who work in such a way that no physical forms are made, yet they would still say, "this is my art?"

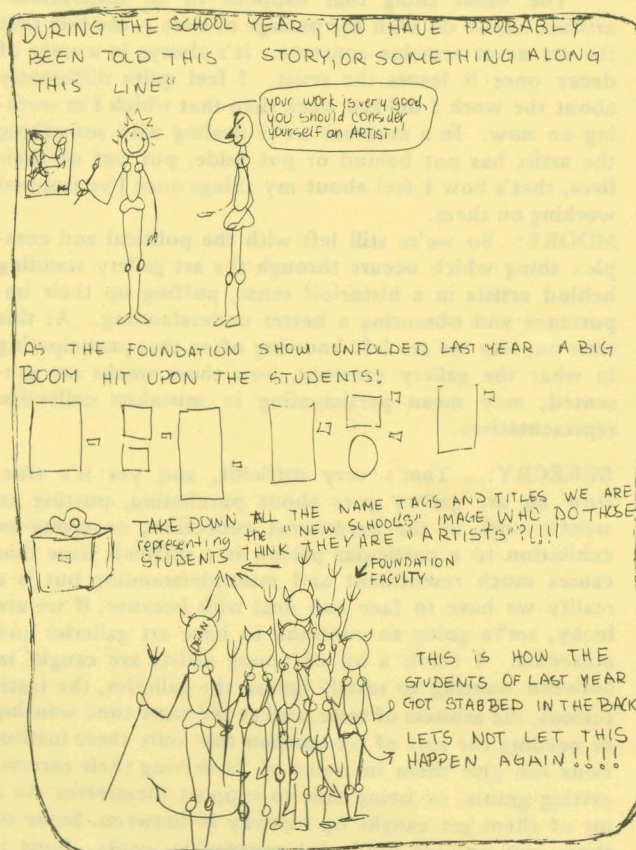
BERECRY: It happens, yes, you do meet people like that. There are people who feel the things they're doing in their lives are art. And perhaps they're right. Yet to say that your life is your art is often a copout. Many of the people you meet who say that haven't really thought it through. There's a consciousness necessary to make any of your actions art. A lot of people will do things and think that because they're expressing whatever they have inside them — whether it is confusion, neurosis, happiness, depression, whatever — it's art. Art is not simply gratuitous expression. There are some people, not very many, that you meet who do, I think, actually make art in their



Photograph of a work by Neil Berecry (1977) judged in last year's HPG Awards. "I make my works very much as tools, tools I use to manipulate my thoughts, or to do something to my ideas. . . ."

lives. Their life is their art. But they are very few, and they're not usually the people who'll come and say, "My life is my art."

On the other hand, I think there are people who can honestly say that. This is very confusing, you see, because I work in a similar way myself. I try and apply the "art" energies and approaches I have to much of what I do — if someone wants to call it art then it's their problem, it's not mine. I try to do it consciously, and also intuitively, there's a play between the two, a play between the science and the magic. It's not with the intention of producing anything I can later label art, or that anyone else could label art. But I can, because it's been made in that way, afterwards apply to what I've done all of the tools I would apply in looking at anyone else's art. I've done it in this house, this place I'm living in. The whole thing was very consciously done, but I'm not going to analyze it in those terms. Yet I can make all sorts of analogies, I can relate it to various art styles and approaches to so-called art making if I want to. Yet I'm not going to say my life is my art. Both things involve paradox and contradiction,



we're getting into my art, you know.

MOORE: Yes, we're bordering on taking a look at the elements in your work. Let me ask a couple of questions here first, with a humorous bent, such as what sorts of things can one not afford to believe, in the sense of art contexts. I think you may have answered one of them by saying that one can't really go around saying that my life is my art.

McINTYRE: On the other hand, why can't you? Some people are very successful with that.

BERECRY: Sometimes that statement is made by people and it's accurate, but mostly by people where it's just easy. Anyway, the things we must not believe in? The things you can't believe in? Oh, you can believe in anything at all, that's one of the nice things about us.

MOORE: Aw shucks, and I thought we were going to get a few Mark Twain eulogies here.

BERECRY: No seriously, you can believe in anything you like, so what's the problem? I hope people producing art can believe in art as being many many different things. One thing we can't afford to believe in is that there is one thing to believe in or not believe in, or that one should only believe in certain things, or that you can ask questions like that.

MOORE: Touché. One more question before we get into your work, if we could. I wanted to know if there was any kinship you felt with other artists of this time.

BERECRY: Ah, kinship. . . I feel kinship with certain artists, not close kinship. I find some of them are dealing with things I'm dealing with, some of them are working in very similar ways. So I suppose I should feel a kinship with them, but I don't particularly, possibly because there hasn't been a connection in the development of the ideas. We seem to have arrived at the same or similar point together, but we haven't made the journey together. We might not even have arrived along parallel roads, we might have come from completely different directions, and we might head off in completely different directions or in the same direction, I don't know. But it's almost like a coincidental meeting; I don't think it's coincidental or insignificant that so many people seem to be converging around certain nodes, I suppose you could say, of philosophical positions. Certain thought patterns emerge simultaneously in very different places, and maybe in retrospect we will realize why they appear to have arrived there for different reasons and the historical significance of where and what it is. I feel in a strange position with my work in that I can find parallels in other people's work, but I find. . . I'm avoiding specifying people, you see. . . I've got a problem. There are very few people with whom I talk about my work here in Vancouver. Now that's not entirely because they're not around. For some reason I tend not to talk a great deal about my art with people. There are people I feel a kinship with, in that I know they partly understand the way I'm thinking, and I understand the way they're thinking about their art, and I don't need to talk about it. I know that if we talked we'd probably agree. I love to see their work when they produce it, because in their work they crystallize those common concerns. They will have probably taken some of those things that I'm concerned about a few steps further than I've reached, and maybe in my work I do the same to them. I subscribe to and read a lot of magazines on contemporary art, international magazines. I'm very interested in what's happening in other places, particularly in Europe. I don't think we hear enough of what's happening in Europe or anywhere else outside North America.

McINTYRE: Is that because a great deal of the contemporary art scene just doesn't seem to be happening around here anyway to begin with? Do you feel there is that sort of void and that sort of schism, which is why you can't find a touch here with dialogue?

BERECRY: It could be — but then on the other hand I think I'm dealing with my own personality, and I don't know what it's like for other people because I tend to work, when I work, in isolation and talk about it in retrospect. Because when I'm in the middle of it I'm not ready to talk about it. For example, some time ago, I made the choice of talking about the latest piece on which I'm working, and now I have constantly to update people because each time I see them so much has changed.

Another thing is that each year since I've been in Canada I've left the country and gone elsewhere. I've been able to afford it because I've worked all the time. When I

Info on the show (Foundation)

Les objets d'art are to be submitted on Friday April 6 at the fourth floor Water Street, up until 9:00 P.M. A maximum of four works per student may be submitted. Only currently enrolled students may bring in work and these must have been produced during the year (though not necessarily in the workshops).

A brief form may accompany each piece for identification and explanation. These forms will be available before the end of the month. Individual or group productions in virtually any medium including slides, film, and video, may be submitted. Also, student documentation of classes and projects will be welcome.

Presentation and details of the show are being handled by Sam Carter's class. The criteria for selection are being hammered out jointly by a student-faculty committee comprised of Alison Browse, Stephen Clarke, Steve Harrison, Susan Hillman, Dale Hunter and Sandra Platt.

The show will be held in the Robson Square Media Centre in the new courthouse complex. A good public location with good facilities for various media.

Opening night will be Tuesday April 17 at 7:00 P.M. The show will run from 9:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. April 18 to 27 Monday through Saturday.



way the world can work, for how the universe can be laid out, how you can get from one universe to another without going faster than the speed of light. Such diagrams look like aboriginal bark paintings, showing you how an emu — a nice Australian reference — goes from one watering hole to another. I've got pictures which look identical; it's not scientific to make that sort of comparison.

MOORE: Apparently the unified field theory borders on being proved true. It's quite a remarkable intention, though to me it seems to come at a time when science as we've known it is going through a thorough transformation, having to finally recognize the intuitive and psychological elements. One thing about relativity is that it has a lot to do with tricks, especially Einstein's "observer."

BERECRY: It's unfortunate we will only have an opportunity today to mention these ideas superficially because I really think these issues are affecting the way people do their art, apart from everything else. Once you've got space and time as being part of the same continuum, how can you deal with the concept of space as a sculptor without dealing with the concept of time? We're going through a post-renaissance, post-perspective period and the philosophical shifts will be reflected in the arts. The old laws no longer apply. It's not surprising that people are conjuring with velocity and movement and doing performance work, all the processes which deal with time and space and the relationships between the two.

MOORE: So while you're dealing with these aspects, how much of a form of discovery takes place for you?

BERECRY: Ah, a great deal. Almost to the point where it becomes unnecessary to make the work in the end. If I don't get the work actually manifested out there in a touchable form, there's a danger that I don't do it at all. I've been working on this piece since last August — I've got to the point where if I don't do it very quickly, I

Information: all ECCA Students

STUDENT SERVICES IS RESEARCHING THE POSSIBILITY OF CREATING A STUDENT HANDBOOK WITH THE INTENTION OF MAKING IT USEFUL AND COMPREHENSIVE. AT THIS TIME IT MEANS LEARNING OF INFORMATION NEEDS THAT STUDENTS HAVE, PARTICULARLY SUCH NEEDS NOT CURRENTLY BEING MET. HAVE YOU FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENT GOVERNMENT, HOUSING, ADMINISTRATION, MEDICAL NEEDS, THE COMMUNITY, OR LEGAL MATTERS, OR MAYBE EVEN JUST PHONE NUMBERS? IS THERE INFORMATION THAT WOULD BE NECESSARY FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS; ONGOING OR GRADUATING STUDENTS?

IF A STUDENT HANDBOOK IS NOT TO HAVE BLATANT WEAKNESSES, THIS WILL BE BECAUSE WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO SAY THAT SUCH AND SUCH INFORMATION IS NEEDED. IN OTHER WORDS WE CAN EXPECT NO ONE BUT OURSELVES TO SAY WHAT WOULD BE OF USE THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL YEAR. THIS IS A PRIORITY FOR ALL STUDENTS. A PRIORITY WHICH MUST BE ACCOMPLISHED BY 26TH MARCH. WHATEVER YOUR QUESTIONS OR INFORMATION NEEDS, LET IT BE KNOWN BY LEAVING THESE WITH EVA ALLEN IN PERSON OR IN HER BOX AT THE DUNSMUIR STREET SCHOOL.

won't do it at all, because I've learnt almost all there is to learn about it. This piece constantly changes. I make my works very much as tools, tools I use to manipulate my thoughts, or to do something to my ideas, and that is their main purpose to me. It's almost like saying I need to do something to my head, but I haven't got the right tools to do it, haven't got the right size wrench or whatever, so I have to make it. In that sense they're very directly related to the mental processes; they are directly needed and functional and they are shaped to fit a specific way. Once I've made them, I've in fact used them. And maybe I get to like them afterwards. Once they're out there and I'm looking at them as an artifact, I can quite like artifacts as well. This one in my kitchen takes up a lot of space but I haven't felt like throwing it away yet.

There's something about the making of a piece that's almost an imperative and a responsibility. And when I'm doing it I'm running on a really fine edge. There's a fear involved — and also an excitement and an enjoyment. I think it's something to do with what Rauschenberg described when he was at the gallery, when he said that the artist and the athlete are very similar in the sense that they go beyond where they have been before, but at the same time they have to maintain their form. You lose that form and you've had it, and if you don't push yourself beyond that limit, it's not good enough. Another belief is contained in the statement it's not how well you answer the question but what the question is you're attempting to answer. Another cliché perhaps but one which to some extent is valid.

MOORE: Given that your work's as inaccessible as it is, that you had the hesitations you did about elucidating your "life and art," how do you account for the measured success you had with the Helen Pitt Graduate Awards? It seemed a startling moment last spring for the striving painters and sculptors and image-makers.

BERECRY: Well, I hope they learned their lesson. Really, look, the reason that work was successful, and I think I can look at it objectively as a body of work, was that I was working separately and the work wasn't striving to be anything — it had an autonomy to it. It had an integrity to it which work that's striving to be something else doesn't have. It may have a long way to go, but in that exhibition I think that was one thing Vera Frankel was looking for, work which had something of the individual, something of individual development, and that's...

McINTYRE: Something of a fortunate occurrence. You're lucky, at least she had enough insight to become fascinated with something that seemed to have a distance from itself.

BERECRY: The awards are quite important yet no one has dealt with them critically. Annually there's the opportunity for people to examine the institutions they're paying their tax dollars for, and to relate the work produced to what's happening in the institution elsewhere in the world, B.C., and Canada. I think that's an exciting opportunity...

McINTYRE: Yes, it can broaden things beyond the urban or provincial scopes.

BERECRY: Questions will only be asked about the competition if someone cares enough or is angry enough to do so. And that's always the case. I think what has to be spelled out all the way through something like the HPG Awards competition is the criteria that's being used in the selection process.

X Newsletter, Emily Carr College of Art.

the art context

Five students graduating in Fine Arts from three British Columbia institutions will be selected to receive \$3,000 apiece under a new awards programme administered by the Vancouver Foundation.

The money was designated by the Culture Committee of the Vancouver Foundation, which decided to use the income from a bequest in the will of Mrs. Helen Pitt, who died in 1976, for this purpose. The Helen Pitt Fund for Fine Arts has been providing bursaries to fine arts students in B.C. since 1961.

Among those receiving the award was NEIL BERECRY from ECCA. VERA FRENKEL adjudicated the exhibition. Following is an edited version of her evaluations which appeared in the June-July issue of VANGUARD.

It turns out that I have to see through the work to the art energy that informs it; I can't look at anything, because what I am looking at is, as often as not, in its trance state, turgid, routine, laboured, clever and strangely cautious. This is what we do to students. Often it is what they want us to do. We give them the forms. We require them to encompass and to overcome them, to astonish us. They almost never do. They're too busy pleasing us.

I have been addressing myself to a body of work that manifests fully and impressively a range of competences that clothe the old person whose job it is to utter sounds, but that obscure the voice, the energy we call art. This may be inevitable, perhaps a necessary stage in the process of one generation handing on to the next what it does and does not know. It is this process, i.e., the shape of continuity, that a juror, willingly or not, must consider in looking at the work of graduating students.

It's a useful time to look at such work from the point of view of survival; not so much of the artists — all the finalists who are showing work in this exhibition are likely to survive handily; — but of art.

I understand the Helen Pitt Bequest, administered by the Vancouver Foundation, to be an investment in that survival. By this means, we are given, the previous jurors and I, an opportunity to consider important questions. Members of the public will see the results of these considerations, and some of the work. The true meaning of these awards remains the inevitable change in the climate of art-making that must result from the process of self-evaluation.

From the results of this process, I have chosen those works through which, nonetheless, the young voice emerges; that suggests to me despite my own biases, or the biases of the teachings these artists have received, despite the horniness of ambition, despite the acquired modes of presentations of self, despite the terrible urgency just to be witnessed that informs much art-making; — those works that manifest, still, despite the years of difficult and well-meaning schooling, a voice that belongs at least in part to itself, and if left alone, will join the continuity that we call art.

The juror must be judged. My own preference is for a personal exploratory, transformational, multi-layered and sometimes, where useful, baffling and challenging art. This is possible in all media. It is not a function of the form, although it is necessary to search out in each instance the form that fits the intent, or to invent it. It seems to me that the art energy I value can find itself — as it has in this exhibition — in the most modest of water colours, or, in the most encompassing inter-disciplinary embrace of the culture and its history. It is evident in work that is highly personal and intimate as well as in work that aspires to some aspect of detachment and monumentality.

The most difficult task of all, in my view, has been the work of the internal juries of the participating institutions. I can think of no more delicate responsibility than for colleagues to come together to assess each other's concerns through the vehicle of student achievement. I happen to think that the teaching of art is among the few honorable and worthwhile activities one can engage in. What is carried on in the sharing of insight about art is the culture at its most resolved and re-solving, by a study of both its most lasting and most fluid parameters. Few things are more important.

And the money. It will go to five young artists, each of whom will receive \$3,000. This is not, in my opinion, a reward for anything. It is an acknowledgement from me, and from my peers who made the initial selections, that at the heart of whatever these young artists are doing, is evidence of a gift which they are obliged to pay attention to and to care for. This is their job. And just to keep things clear, let me say that the competition was damned close. Another juror might easily have decided differently.

Letters to 'X' (site you)

Mr. Bob Evermon
Lithography Department
British Columbia College of Art
249 Dunsmuir St.
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 1X2

Patrick L. McGeer
Minister of Education,
Science and Technology

Dear Mr. McGeer:

I write this letter to you out of desperation and frustration. The hopes lives and careers of many of British Columbia's future artists could depend on action taken now to a very grave problem

in our province. I feel I can give you a little insight because of my special view as a teacher and artist for many years at the Vancouver School of Art. Better yet would be to talk to you personally.

The subject of this letter is the B.F.A. and M.F.A. program at the Emily Carr College of Art, of which there is none. If you could understand as I do the importance and weight of a degree program to our British Columbia studio art students, I feel you would act immediately. Whatever your feelings are about the visual arts, I am talking about the heritage of Durer, Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Van Gogh, Picasso, and our own Haida, some of the greatest people and high points of mankind. Our students are trying to stand on the shoulders of these great people and you have the power to give strength to the Van Gogh's of British Columbia. Why should not the children of British Columbia have the same opportunity to develop their potentials as other provinces or states. There is not one studio visual art school in all of B.C. that gives a B.F.A. or M.F.A. degree.

Our students must procure an excellent art studio program with a degree in their pocket. This is the ticket they need to open doors so they can prove their ability. Open doors so as not to be penalised for not having a degree ticket for further study and advancement. The ticket for the Michelangelos of our province, that will open the doors to the Sistine Chapel. The great artists of the world have to come from somewhere, why not British Columbia?

The B.F.A. and M.F.A. programs will be stronger programs for the E.C.A.A. and will give more incentive and a little more depth in study to an already great program. Our printmaking program is one of the best anywhere in the world but yet it is hard to bring in graduate students to specialize with us without the M.F.A. program. They want very much to study with my program in lithography, but also in today's world they need the degree ticket. Many positions automatically require a degree no matter how good you are. Without this degree our students are cheated out of the opportunity to study with some of the greatest minds of our times. Our students need goals, high examples for them to reach for; if we can draw in these great minds to our isolated province and set these examples for our students, what arguments could there possibly be for not procuring and encouraging this course of excellence.

Give us the tools to help create excellence. Give us the tools to attract the Picassos, Goyas, and Rauschenbergs of the future to British Columbia. Give us the tools to help make a great art school, a history making art school.

If this letter seems dramatic, that's because it is meant to be, for it comes from every fiber of my body. My life is art, being an artist and teaching the best I know how.

Sincerely,
R. Evermon
Head of Lithography, E.C.C.A.

copy
Robin Mayor
Tom Hudson
Vancouver X Newspaper
received March 5, 1979

Dear Makara and 'X':

Thanks for telling us all about the poem in the last issue, and then not allowing our impressionable little minds (are these still the formative years?) to be strained by the awesome task of deciding for ourselves. Taking on the chore of protecting us seems... what?... paternalistic? condescending? I don't know, make up my mind for me, what should I think? Do you think, "well, it's okay for us to see this stuff 'cause after all we're so evolved, but all those masses out there..."

As for those words "cunts" and "pricks" and "fucking," I find most poems that I've seen using them as a joke, in the same manner kids go "pee-pee, poo-poo," to shock, hardly offensive, at worst boring. But that's not to say that excellent poems aren't written using them. Is this one of them? I don't know, some special interest pressure group kept me from finding out. Why, maybe a great poem could be written that "... compares the taste of women's bodies (unfavourably) to food..." (Lord knows, sometimes they do...) But maybe it's an offensive poem. However, like Huxley's savage (in *Brave New World*) who defended his freedom to be unhappy in spite of the "paradise" totalitarian society, I defend my right to be offended as well as pleased, even to be bored, if that's all the poem offers.

Perhaps 'X' will show some balls (oops, sorry ladies) and get it published somewhere else. I hear that some copies had it as an insert. Right on, but halfway, 'X'.

Anyways, who are the goddamned editors of this paper? The editors? Why don't you give Makara their own little column in the paper on a regular basis where they can expound their own specific beliefs? Actually I'd be interested in reading it.

Makara, I don't like seeing any person or group treated with disrespect either, but it's a hard fact of life, and it can't be ignored, only dealt with by looking at the exploitation right in the eye — on an individual basis. I reject the liberties that you have taken, whatever the best intentions were.

—Bruce Archibald

P.S. According to your logic, those Elizabethan sonnets with the sentiments like, "How shall I love thee," and then going on about nipples like rose buds and skin like milk or whatever, would be equally objectionable. You negate the poet's tool of metaphor. Besides, as well as... oh hell... that's all I got to say.

Bruce: On the one hand, one has the right to choose for oneself; on the other hand, does one have the "right" to be offensive in the sense noted? Artists seem to choose principles or codes by which to live and work, and Makara being no different, have chosen their own guiding principles. Our working relationship with Makara includes having to decide about all sorts of issues, including content of material sent to them. In this instance, this relationship took its course, where we recognized that Richard's adamancy would persist and the piece would make it into 'X' anyway. Half of the 500 copies distributed included his poem, as he felt that would be sufficient for gathering reactions. He was, himself, unclear of his intentions with the poem; at the same time, once hearing of Makara's reaction, he felt that such work as his was just what 'X' needed to sell newspapers. Though there were some lovely spots in his piece, and though he expresses some of his own self-limitations and jealousies, one is left to ponder if indeed his thoughts were getting at anything. What other more tempestuous issue is there among participants of liberal democracy than censorship and the accompanying moralistic problems. In fact, 'X' newsletter seems to be much of the same tradition, no matter its best intentions.

We did not find "By the Deep Fryer" offensive, though there are attitudes we find objectionable. Perhaps the writer experiences a confusion towards his (ancient) muse. The question is: has the writer learned from his situation and the criticisms, has he disentangled his expectations from his surroundings, and what is the price of rice in Newfoundland. Hmmm. X

co-editors